

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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2000 001-0881

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

December 21, 1979

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RECEIVED
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Hon. Cyrus R. Vance
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Vance:

As you know, recent upheavals in South Korea have produced conflicting signals about that country's attitude toward basic human rights. President Choi Kyu Hah appears to have taken some steps to free political prisoners incarcerated during the regime of President Park. Most notably, President Choi recently released from house arrest noted dissident Kim Dae Jung.

While we can all welcome any steps taken to ease the repression of basic human rights in South Korea, I was deeply disturbed to learn that some repression still continues and may, in fact, be getting worse. I refer you to the enclosed article on the arrest of Korean Quaker Ham Sok Hon. Mr. Ham, along with some 96 other religious leaders and academicians, was arrested on November 24 for speaking up in support of human rights during a wedding party in Seoul. According to news accounts, Mr. Ham - who is 78 years old - was then tortured by his captors. Although it is my understanding that he was released on December 11 or 12, to arrest persons for what they say is reprehensible, and to torture or otherwise physically abuse them is barbarous in the extreme.

I am, therefore, requesting you to seek a full accounting of the circumstances surrounding Mr. Ham's arrest and detention. I would also urge the Department of State to take every possible step to ensure that Mr. Ham is not subjected to further harassment by the Korean government. I am particularly concerned by suggestions that the Korean military police have taken a central role in domestic affairs, and I trust that the Department of State will convey to the

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Government of the Republic of Korea, including its military establishment, that a continuation of such gross violations of basic human rights can not fail to undermine support in this country for military and economic assistance to their country.

Thank you for your courtesy and prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

John F. Seiberling
John F. Seiberling
Member of Congress

JFS:rm

Enclosure

Revoked in Seoul

The prognosis had changed but there was a certain familiarity in the plot as Choi Kyu Huh was elected President of South Korea last week. Before his election, Mr. Choi promised to revise South Korea's authoritarian Constitution swiftly and to call new, democratic elections next year. But human rights advocates, made



President Choi Kyu Huh

cynical by 18 years of Park Government repression, were not encouraged by Mr. Choi's inaugural message to the 2,500-member electoral college which overwhelmingly endorsed his candidacy. He stressed the need for "order and stability" following Mr. Park's murder Oct. 26.

As a gesture of "national reconciliation," President Choi yesterday revoked Emergency/Decree 9, a Park-era law that banned all criticism of the Government, and 68 prisoners were released. In addition, Kim Dae Jung, South Korea's most prominent dissident, was freed from house arrest. However, a list compiled by Christian activists showed that 46 persons arrested under the emergency decree remained in jail; several dozen others were being held under antiriot and security laws.

The legal basis for human rights was not noticeably enhanced by Mr. Choi's action since the country remains under martial law. Dissident sources said that Christian students and others arrested since President Park's death for attempting to hold meetings in violation of martial law had been subjected to torture. Army interrogators, the sources said, beat and pulled out the whiskers of a 78-year-old Quaker, Ham Suk Hun, and pushed water into the stomachs of detainees through their mouths and noses and then jumped on them.

The most positive Government step, from the dissident point of view, was the release of Kim Dae Jung, who nearly defeated Mr. Park for President in 1971, when South Korea last held free elections. At a news conference, Mr. Kim demanded new elections "the sooner the better," warning that delay could lead to "political and social chaos."

However, the generals who wield real power under the martial law regime have made it plain that they are loath to dismantle the Park system. Neither is Kim Jong Pil, the former army officer who planned the bloodless coup that brought Mr. Park to power in 1961. Mr. Kim, who founded the Democratic Republican Party for Mr. Park, succeeded the slain President as its leader last month and needs time to retool it into a personal vehicle.



Left to right: Margaret Lucan, Ham Sok Hon, and Chin Young Sang

an interview

HAM
SOK
HON



Photo by Virginia Sutton

TEACHER HAM SOK HON VISITS PENDLE HILL

Teacher Ham Sok Hon returned to Pendle Hill on October 3, 1979. Traveling to America from the Friends World Committee gathering in Gwatt, Switzerland, Teacher Ham was accompanied by Chin Young San, Clerk of the Seoul, Korea, Friends Meeting.